

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

HIDDEN UNIT AND BUCHANAN UNIT
LONG-TERM CONTRACT RENEWAL
THROUGH FEBRUARY 28, 2026

HIDDEN UNIT AND BUCHANAN UNIT
CENTRAL VALLEY PROJECT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
MID-PACIFIC REGION
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

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2/14/01

FONSI No.

01-05-MP

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BACKGROUND

The Mid-Pacific Regional Office of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has found that an environmental impact statement is not required for the proposed execution of two Long-Term Water Service Contracts (LTWSC): one each for Hidden and Buchanan Units. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) document incorporates by reference Reclamation's Friant Division Long-Term Contract Renewal Environmental Assessment (EA) (January 2001). The Friant Division EA evaluated the environmental impacts of renewal of 30 LTWSCs with execution of the negotiated contracts as the preferred alternative. This FONSI is based on the analysis (contained in the Friant Division EA) for the renewal of the Hidden Unit and Buchanan Unit contracts.

Before renewal of existing long-term contracts, the Central Valley Project Improvement Act of 1992 (CVPIA) stipulates that Reclamation must prepare and complete a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS), pursuant to NEPA, analyzing the direct and indirect impacts and benefits associated with the implementation of the CVPIA. This was completed with the Record of Decision signed on January 9, 2001.

In accordance with Section 3404(c), authorization of long-term contract renewals (LTCRs) also requires appropriate environmental review. This was the subject of the Friant Division EA, which tiered from the CVPIA PEIS and also included the water service contracts for the Hidden and Buchanan Units. The PEIS addressed the impacts and benefits of implementing the CVPIA provisions and allowed subsequent environmental documents to incorporate the PEIS analysis and limited reevaluation of region-wide impacts of the CVPIA. The Friant Division EA concentrated on localized impacts of continued water deliveries to 28 water service contractors (with 30 contracts) resulting from the 25-year LTCRs.

In addition to other Central Valley Project (CVP) contracts, Reclamation has executed, or is in the process of executing Long-Term Water Service Contracts with the Friant Division Contractors and one each for the Hidden and Buchanan Units (which deliver water to Madera ID and Chowchilla ID respectively) for 25 years, to February 28, 2026, consistent with the provisions of the CVPIA. This action is necessary to continue water deliveries to existing CVP contractors for agricultural, municipal, and industrial purposes. The Friant Division EA fully analyzed the environmental impacts of contract renewal with Hidden and Buchanan Units as is described in the "Findings" below; however due to an administrative oversight the contracts and/or contractual water entitlements of these two units were omitted from Tables ES - 1, PN - 1 and SE - 6 in the referenced EA. Table LU - 1, however, does include these contracts.

The proposed action is addressed as the Preferred Alternative in the referenced EA. The LTCR contract provisions are similar to many of the provisions in the CVP Interim Renewal Contracts and includes contract terms and conditions consistent with CVPIA requirements. Under the LTCR provisions, changes to the terms of the contract also included tiered water pricing provision, environmental commitments, definition of municipal and industrial water users, water measurements, and water conservation. The EA and the scope of the analysis were developed consistent with regulations and guidance from the Council on Environmental Quality, and in accordance with the analysis provided in *NRDC v. Patterson*, Civ. No. S-88-1658 (Patterson). In *Patterson* the Court found that "...[o]ngoing projects and activities require NEPA procedures only when they undergo changes amounting in themselves to further "major action"..."

In addition the Court went further to state that the NEPA statutory requirement applies only to those changes. The analysis in the EA finds in large part that the renewal of the contracts is in essence a continuation of the "status quo." Although there are financial and administrative changes to the contracts, they perpetuate the existing use and allocation of resources (i.e., the same amount of water is going to the same lands for existing/ongoing purposes). The analysis in the EA therefore addresses the proposed changes to the contract and the potential environmental effects of those changes. These contract changes, as addressed in the attached EA, would not result in significant deterioration of the environment.

FINDINGS

Reclamation finalized an EA on the project in January 2001, which is incorporated by reference. In accordance with NEPA and consistent with the EA, the Mid-Pacific Regional Office has found that the proposed action is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Consequently, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is supported by the following factors:

1. Surface Water Resources - The proposed action would not change, and thus have no effect on CVP operations or water service contract amounts. Contractors will continue conjunctive use of available surface water and groundwater with greater emphasis on groundwater use when CVP surface water is limited.
2. Water Supply - The proposed action would not change nor have any effect on CVP operations or water service contract amounts; and thus will not affect water supply. Water stored in the two reservoirs will be fully utilized. Contractors will continue conjunctive use of available surface water and groundwater but with greater emphasis on groundwater during dry periods when CVP water is limited.
3. Groundwater Resources - Contractors will continue conjunctive use of available surface water and groundwater but with greater emphasis on groundwater when economically beneficial or when CVP water is limited. Greater use of CVP water when water is available should allow the groundwater table to recharge. Since management strategies of groundwater is essentially independent from the proposed action, there will be no significant effect on groundwater resources.
4. Water Quality - The proposed action will not change the surface water or groundwater quality from historic conditions. The quality of groundwater will be reflective of the surface water quality used for groundwater recharge. Thus there are no effects of the proposed action on water quality.
5. Fisheries Resources - The proposed action will have no impacts on fishery resources since the proposed action will not affect reservoir operations, surface water, or water quality. Contractors will continue their conjunctive use of available surface water and groundwater but with greater emphasis on groundwater when economically beneficial or when CVP water is limited.

6. Land Use Resources - The proposed action will not result in growth-inducing impacts, and thus have no effect on land use because there would be no changes to CVP operations or contract amounts.
7. Biological Resources - The proposed action does not increase the water service contract amounts, require additional facilities (dams, canals, etc.), or convert natural habitat to farmland. Consequently, the continued historic operations under the proposed action will not affect the areas's existing biological resources.
8. Threatened and Endangered Species - Consultation pursuant to the Endangered Species Act has been completed with both the Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service. Both Services have issued non-jeopardy biological opinions. The implementation of the various commitments and requirements in these opinions will ensure that there will be no significant impact on any listed species or designated critical habitat. All requirements and environmental commitments identified in these biological opinions are incorporated by reference.
9. Recreational Resources - Recreational opportunities would remain unchanged and thus unaffected by the proposed action. CVP facilities or operations at the Buchanan, Friant, and Hidden dams would continue as present. Recreational usage reflects water storage volumes in the lakes. Lake level fluctuations and river conditions will continue to depend on volume, inflow, storage, and downstream needs and demands, all independent from the proposed action.
10. Socioeconomic Resources - The proposed action will have a less than significant effect on economic resources. The largest variations seen in irrigated acres, gross revenue, net revenue, and employment in the region occur as a result of changes in the weather and commodity demands. The changes associated with dry years include reductions of irrigated acres by less than two percent, gross revenue by less than one percent, and decreases in employment by less than one percent.
11. Cultural Resources - The proposed action will not result in direct impacts to eligible or significant cultural resources because no additional infrastructure will be constructed and no land use changes or conversions into farmland or other uses are proposed.
12. Social Conditions - The proposed action will not impact social conditions. The proposed action does not change the CVP management, facilities operation, or result in any construction of additional facilities.
13. Air Quality - The proposed action will not change existing CVP facilities or operations, or result in the construction of new facilities. Present emission rates and volumes are expected to continue for the lands in the Friant Division and Hidden and Buchanan service areas. Consequently, air quality would remain similar to current conditions.
14. Geology and Soils - The proposed action will not change the facilities and operations and will have no significant effect on the soil and geology. Increased groundwater usage during dry years may lower water table levels, increase salt accumulations in soils, cause soil subsidence, and

reduce groundwater quality. These conditions are expected to be eliminated with the application of CVP water at the end of the dry period which should allow recharge of the groundwater table, diminish soil subsidence, and reduce salt accumulation in soils.

15. Visual Resources - The proposed action will not change CVP management, facilities, and reservoir operations, and will have no significant effect on visual resources. Cultivated and fallow acreage patterns would be similar to historic patterns. Any retired or fallow lands are expected to have fully planted crop coverage during the last year of cultivation.
16. Indian Trust Assets - There are no changes to CVP management, reservoir operations, or facilities that are part of the proposed action that would interfere with, or affect Indian Trust Assets.
17. Environmental Justice - This proposed action would not have a disproportionate affect on any minority or disadvantaged populations. There are no changes to the current operations of facilities that would engender any such effects.